



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Apostle Islands
National Lakeshore

415 Washington Avenue
Bayfield, Wisconsin 54814

715 779-3397 phone
715 779-3049 fax

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Contact(s): Bob Krumenaker

Phone number: (715) 779- 3397 x101

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Apostle Islands National Lakeshore Releases Climate-Friendly Action Plan

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore Superintendent Bob Krumenaker announced the release of the park's new Climate-Friendly Action Plan, which will serve as the northern Wisconsin national park's blueprint for reducing its carbon footprint and increasing the sustainability of its operations. "We began by quantifying our own greenhouse gas emissions," Krumenaker said. "Then we invited community leaders and park staff to a workshop last summer to learn about the science of climate change and the predicted impacts to our area, and asked for their ideas of how we might make our operations more efficient. Every idea was analyzed and the plan reflects our commitment to specific actions that are achievable and likely to be effective. It's certainly ambitious but we're committed to it."

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore is the 12th U.S. national park unit to become a "Climate Friendly Park." Local National Park Service (NPS) staff have received support from the NPS Environmental Leadership and Natural Resources Stewardship and Science programs and technical assistance from the Environmental Protection Agency.

University of Duluth-Minnesota scientist Jay Austin, who spoke at the Apostle Islands 2007 workshop, showed that surface waters of Lake Superior have warmed by almost five degrees Fahrenheit since 1980. Other scientists have shown that extreme heat events in the Great Lakes area are more frequent than in the past, the growing season is getting longer, and the duration of ice cover on Lake Superior has decreased significantly over the last century. While models are uncertain whether we are likely to see more or less precipitation in our area in the future, they predict that warming will definitely increase. Most models also predict a decrease in the level of Lake Superior. "Last year's record low lake level was a wakeup call for all of us," Krumenaker said, "and helped us all focus on how climate change will affect the lake and the quality of life and economy of this area."

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While there are naturally occurring greenhouse gases, the combustion of fossil fuels for energy and transportation account for most human-caused greenhouse gas emissions. In 2006, National Park Service operations and visitors to the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore generated the equivalent of approximately 672 metric tons of carbon. Not surprisingly, for a park with little infrastructure but dependent upon boats for access, 93% of this was generated by transportation, and 96% of that by watercraft. This calculation includes NPS vessels, concession boats operated by the Apostle Islands Cruise Service, and an estimate of emissions from visitor vessels.

The park's plan calls for reducing greenhouse gas emission by at least 12.5% by 2012. "We've already implemented a number of actions called for in the plan," explained Randy Ross, Chief of Facility Management at Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. "These include the use of biodiesel in our remaining diesel-engine vessels, replacing two-stroke outboards with more efficient, low emission four-strokes, modifying inboard-outboard drive boats to accept the more efficient four-stroke outboards, combining boat trips, taking the shortest routes that weather permits, and at the same time reducing the fleet. This year we plan to replace a 25+ year old boat with a more efficient boat that will be better suited for beach landings as well as hauling supplies." The park has also recently obtained a hybrid car for land transportation.

Using public transportation is a good way to visit the National Lakeshore and keep your own carbon footprint low. The Apostle Islands Cruise Service (<http://www.apostleisland.com>) has several different trips available which can take you around the islands, or land you on Raspberry, Stockton, or Oak islands. Sailing and kayaking are also great climate-friendly ways to boat amongst the islands. Keeping your power boat tuned and running efficiently will also help.

There are several major challenges to achieving the ambitious park goal.

Since the largest portion of greenhouse gases comes from non-NPS vessels, park staff will increase educational efforts and do everything they can to encourage sustainable practices by park visitors, partners, and cooperators. "It's gratifying that there's such a strong interest in sustainability in the Chequamegon Bay communities and that people from all sectors of our local economy are taking steps to become more sustainable. We're all in this together," Krumenaker said. The NPS is actively involved with Travel Green Wisconsin and the Sustainability Committee of the Bayfield Chamber of Commerce, Sustainable Bayfield, and the Alliance for Sustainability.

In addition, the park's two primary mainland-based operations buildings are leased facilities, meaning that cooperation with landlords is essential. Bayfield Mayor Larry MacDonald and Superintendent Krumenaker have jointly committed to making the City of Bayfield-owned Old County Courthouse, which serves as the park headquarters and visitor center, a model of sustainability for a 19th century historic building. "That won't be easy," MacDonald said, "and we won't do anything to compromise the historic integrity of the structure. But we have just replaced the heating system with a state-of-the art high efficiency unit which will significantly reduce energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions – and operating cost."

The final hurdle is that to achieve the National Park Service mission, it's essential that the islands be accessible to visitors, and to have staff travel to and amongst the islands, which is inherently costly in energy. Krumenaker explained, "we need to serve visitors, which means maintaining facilities, providing tours, and performing searches and rescues when necessary. This year we've also been challenged by the need to clear thousands of down trees from trails and campsites resulting from the big April storm." But the principal mission of the National Park Service is conservation, meaning it's essential to know, protect, and where necessary, restore the park's natural and cultural resources. Threats such as exotic species, soil erosion, and simply the ravages of time and the elements on historic buildings require active intervention in order to preserve and maintain the integrity of these nationally-significant resources. "We are increasing our efficiency -- but we have to do more. We need to reduce the overall impact of both NPS and visitor operations without compromising the purposes of the park. It's a great goal and we hope everyone who comes to the islands will participate," Krumenaker added.

The NPS has launched a website called "Do Your Part" which will allow people to pledge the reductions they make in their own carbon footprints to the climate-friendly national park of their choice. This is one way that people who love the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore can not only help, but participate in the park's sustainability drive.

The Apostle Islands National Lakeshore Climate-Friendly Action Plan and other information on climate change, sustainability, and "Do Your Part" can be found at <http://www.nps.gov/apis/naturescience/climate-change-and-sustainability.htm>.

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Information on Jay Austin's research: <http://www.d.umn.edu/~jaustin/ICE.html>

Do Your Part website: <http://www.DoYourPartParks.org>

Photo of NPS biodiesel-powered vessel *Nenookaasi* (Hummingbird in Ojibwe language):



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Chart of NPS 2006 Greenhouse Gas Emissions

